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## American Indian Persistence and Resurgence

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Edited by Karl Kroeber

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## Transitional Narratives and Cultural Continuity

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*Elaine A. Jahner*

Fiction that emerges from the immediate and consciously negotiated experience of radical cultural change constitutes a category of world literature with exemplary pragmatic value for contemporary criticism. American Indian writing provides some notable examples of transitional texts, in which the act of writing is simultaneously a development of an imaginative tradition and an attempted entry into a new cultural order without known precedent and beyond any anticipation implied by the cultural past. Such writing lets us glimpse the challenge of the unimaginable as it provokes experiments with form and content in order to increase the range of a society's imaginative resources. Of course, these general assertions have value only in relation to specific texts.

One largely unpublished body of writing that promises to be a significant stimulus to thoughtful analysis of transitional texts when it is finally published was written by George Sword, an Oglala Sioux political leader, tribal court judge, and spiritual leader, who was born in 1846 and died in

1910.<sup>1</sup> At his funeral, orators called him the Abraham Lincoln of the Sioux nation.<sup>2</sup> In Sword's case, that comparison was more than just occasional rhetoric. The political conflicts that he had to negotiate and the threats to the future of Lakota cultural identity that he understood as clearly as anyone else gave enough legitimacy to the reference so that its repetition affirms its justice.

Sword lived through fundamental social and cultural changes. During his lifetime, the United States forced the Oglala to move from their traditional, seminomadic culture to reservation living, and Sword's continuing leadership role was, in large part, a result of his ability to understand and communicate the terms of necessary adaptations.<sup>3</sup> He learned to be an effective leader within dual political structures, the traditional Lakota ones and the imposed reservation institutions of governance. His responsible determination to understand the spiritual dimensions of his own experience even prompted him to seek grounds common to two different belief systems—Episcopalian Christianity and the visionary Lakota approach to relations between humans and other cosmic powers. He wanted others to benefit from his knowledge, so he cooperated with scholars documenting Lakota history and culture and, in the process, he learned how anthropologists framed their questions about Lakota culture. Finally, his fascination with the effects of transitions from orality to literacy and his desire to en-

sure remembrance of his role in major historical events motivated him to write extensively about his personal experiences and even to record some of his thoughts about what happens to language when people first learn to write it.<sup>4</sup>

Sword gave most of his writing to James R. Walker, the physician and amateur ethnologist who became his friend at Pine Ridge. Partly in response to Walker's questions, Sword spoke and wrote about Lakota beliefs, rituals, and folklore. Some of the resulting texts are direct transcriptions of speech. Other texts, though, show significant evidence of the reflective reconsiderations and aesthetic structuring that occurs when writing provokes awareness of text as artifact. Sword developed a highly idiosyncratic writing style, and he engaged in similarly unique theorizing about etymological sources for Lakota words (see "Plains Indian Native Literatures," by Douglas R. Parks and Raymond J. DeMallie, in this issue). Of particular importance and interest is a ledgerbook in Sword's own Lakota handwriting. Initially translated by Ella Deloria, that collection of writing on various topics is currently being retranslated by Raymond J. DeMallie and will be published bilingually.<sup>5</sup> The Walker manuscript collection also contains imaginative narratives in a mythic mode, for which attribution is still uncertain,

1. Raymond J. DeMallie is currently editing and preparing a new translation of Sword's writing for publication by the University of Nebraska Press. It will be the fourth volume in a series presenting all the manuscripts that James R. Walker acquired while at Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux Reservation. The first volume, edited by DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner, is *Lakota Belief and Ritual* (1980); the second, edited by DeMallie, is *Lakota Society* (1982); and the third, edited by Elaine A. Jahner, is *Lakota Myth* (1984). All are published by the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln. Quotations from these works are cited in my text by title and page number.

2. A. F. Johnson of the Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church first used the phrase in his funeral oration. He added, "Perhaps the next generation may appreciate his worth" (see the Pine Ridge Reservation publication *Oglala Light*, November 1910, 21–23, available through the Nebraska Historical Society).

3. For general historical accounts that include mention of Sword's role, see James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965). Also useful is Robert Utely, *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951). A revealing, if slanted and prejudiced, source is Julia B. McGillicuddy, *McGillicuddy* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1946). The daughter of the agent who worked closely with Sword, Julia McGillicuddy gives revealing vignettes of Sword's activities as understood from the perspective of a government agent.

4. Currently published Sword texts can be found in *Lakota Belief and Ritual* and in *Lakota Myth*. These books also contain some analysis of the Sword corpus of writing and of our efforts to find information that allows us to attribute the texts and judge their status. For other references, see Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987). My article in that volume, entitled "Lakota Genesis: The Oral Tradition," addresses some of the same issues as this one, but it gives only passing attention to George Sword and his texts because I concentrate on more traditional precedents for what Sword has done.

5. The ledgerbook has 245 pages in Sword's Lakota handwriting. Inside the front cover is pasted a small piece of paper, on which is written, in Lakota, "George Sword, these he wrote." There are thirteen separate sections and topics: (1) Thunder; (2) Killed by Thunder; (3) Warpath; (4) Singing while Fire Gazing; (5) Sword's Autobiography; (6) Indian Ways Explained; (7) Calf Pipe; (8) Men's and Boys' Games; (9) The Sun Dance; (10) The Fox Society; (11) The Beloved Ceremony; (12) About Questing; and (13) Winter Quarters. The ledgerbook is in the Archives of the Colorado Historical Society, in Denver. Microfilm copies of the ledgerbook and of Ella Deloria's translations are in the Boas Collection, Archives of the American Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia; see the files "Dakota Ethnography; Linguistics" and "Dakota Texts from the Sword Manuscript."

In this article, all references, except Iron Hawk's speech, are to Ella Deloria's translation and are cited in my text by manuscript page number only. The Iron Hawk speech is from Raymond J. DeMallie's translation published in this issue of *boundary 2*.

and on that uncertainty hangs much of the tale that this article recounts. Archival research has turned up enough information for us to favor strongly the hypothesis that these texts are the written fictions of George Sword rather than the myths from oral tradition that people long assumed them to be. Slightly reworked English versions of these texts were first published in 1917 as anonymous Lakota myths, and they soon achieved international status as textbook examples illustrating how myth charts worldview.<sup>6</sup> We know from Walker's correspondence with Clark Wissler that they were originally written in Lakota, but the Lakota texts have not yet been found and may well have been inadvertently destroyed. Translations that are as close to the original texts as we have been able to find were published in *Lakota Myth* in 1984. The present essay concentrates on these texts, their relationship to Sword's other writing, their history, and their significance today as exemplary writing that should be compared to transitional texts from other cultures.

With all the possibilities suggested by Sword's other work, why concentrate on texts that might not even be Sword's, that appear to be fictions written to teach about myth rather than orally transmitted communal narratives, that may or may not be an effort to save sacred knowledge for future generations? Why try to second-guess a mystery? My primary reason is that the mythic texts have already had definitive influence on the way people think about American Indian traditions and about the nature and function of myth, in general. The Lakota people themselves and non-Indian scholars have invested these texts with active social and intellectual significance, although for the Lakota this process has been significantly different from the non-Indian developments. For the Lakota, the narratives have proved a bridge to older ways of thinking and interpreting, while scholarly uses of them have been instrumental in shaping theories about relationships between myth and culture. The history of these texts is really a study of what different interest groups want to find in mythic narrative and of how social need informs literary interpretation. Furthermore, it is a history that could be recast with all the fascination of a suspense novel, replete with visions, secrets and vows, discoveries and cover-ups. Having become part of that history by publishing the mythic texts in 1984, however, I resist the easy switch to a sensationalizing tone as inappropriate, even exploitative. My

efforts to find the original versions of the texts and my relationships with different people for whom these texts validated spiritual beliefs incline me to treat them as a revered and threatened cultural resource.

The history of these narratives is a dauntingly complex tale that can easily dominate the story that the texts themselves tell. The possible relationship between the two stories is, finally, the theme linking all others in this essay. My speculative interpretation of the mythic narratives, occurring as the last section of this essay, depends upon historical research that reveals facets of Sword's accomplishments and personality. The significance of the mythic texts is, I believe, bound to Sword's personal sense of mission and destiny as enacted in his political life, friendships, and the various kinds of writing that were a direct response to both. The historical record does not give definitive answers to very many of the questions we have about Sword's life and work. Nevertheless, it is rich and complex enough so that pursuing our questions yields a variety of insights about Lakota culture and, more generally, about narrative in relation to radical cultural change. Whatever position people finally choose to take on the unanswered questions surrounding Sword's texts, no one can deny that they continue to have extraordinary influence, and, I believe, they deserve to have an even larger audience. Therefore, Sword's risks paid off. Walker wrote that Sword had a hard time convincing the elders to allow their knowledge to be written down, so he "argued to the holy men . . . that the Gods of the Oglalas would be more pleased if the holy men told of them so that they might be kept in remembrance and that all the world might know of them" (*Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 47). The fear of being forgotten proved great enough to justify the risks of breaking taboos against telling privileged information to outsiders.

### Sword's Life and Writing

Recorded Oglala history gives us regular glimpses of George Sword as an important supporting actor in dramas that starred Red Cloud and Crazy Horse, Charles Eastman and James R. Walker. Historical accounts of events occurring between the 1867 Wagon Box Fight and the early reservation years mention Sword as an advisor who occasionally stepped out of his background role to do what other leaders seemed unwilling or unable to do. Standard historiographic narrative conventions, however, distort the roles of people, such as Sword, who remained at the sidelines of the most public exchanges between the United States government and the Lakota

6. James R. Walker, "The Sundance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota," American Museum of Natural History, *Anthropological Papers*, vol. 16, pt. 2 (1917).

nation even though their knowledge and understanding of what was at stake may well have been central to the outcome of political negotiations.

One event that allows us to compare Sword's account with published historical versions was his January 1877 visit to the Crazy Horse camp, a journey made in order to urge the charismatic and still-resistant Crazy Horse to bring his people to the reservation because it was their only chance for survival. Crazy Horse finally agreed and led his people to the agency, but soon after his surrender, he was murdered.<sup>7</sup> Then, as now, the mediator risks setting up the conditions of betrayal, a basic human fact that seems to have worried Sword, because he took every chance he could get to set the record straight, not just in reference to his active role but in regard to his motives, as well. He wrote about the Crazy Horse episode in two sections of his autobiographical statement, and, judging from notes, it was the first issue he addressed in his interview with Eli Ricker, even though Ricker himself seems to have been more interested in events such as the Fetterman Massacre and the Wagon Box Fight.<sup>8</sup> It is as though Sword knew that he was caught in a vortex of historical currents and countercurrents, and he wanted to leave no doubt that his consistent goal as a leader was to establish the social conditions under which his people could "grow and thrive without fear."<sup>9</sup>

7. See Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942).

8. Eli Ricker, interview with George Sword, 1907, MS tablet 16, Ricker Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. Donald F. Danker, in *The Wounded Knee Interviews of Eli S. Ricker* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1981), describes Ricker's methods: "Eli Ricker spent about a quarter of a century gathering material for the history that would be fair to the Indian. Participants in the final twenty to fifty years of the Indian-white struggle lived in the area. Ricker sought them out. He interviewed the Indians, the ranchers, the scouts. . . . He used interpreters if necessary and collected innumerable photographs. . . . However, the interview was his main research method. In the pre-tape recorder days he utilized the nickel tablet commonly used by school children. He filled tablet after tablet with interviews, others with notes from books and journals, documents, correspondence, and his own thoughts" (153).

The Sword interview in Tablet 16 is fourteen pages in length. The pages are not numbered.

9. In his autobiography, Sword wrote: "They [Crazy Horse's people] were a great people and the chiefest of all who repudiated peace, but to them Sword went to make peace and he did it. And brought them back to join the people friendly with the government and from this came the killing of Crazy Horse. All over the land, in all places whatever, wars ceased and since then there are no big fights. It was Sword who made the peace for all which men enjoy everywhere now; and now people grow and thrive without fear. He has made

On the question of motives, Sword's autobiographical statement gives information that alters what we can learn through other sources. Sword, more than anyone else, allows us to see clearly that neither he nor Crazy Horse was acting from a position of defeat or from motives of currying favor with the military. Sword gives the detail that allows us to reinterpret what appears to be a defeated people's concession to United States policies as being, in fact, a response that also enacts freely determined decisions about how to prepare for a new stage in their historical development. If, to outsiders, this seems impossible in the light of the military force brought against the Sioux after the Custer Battle, that perception only increases the need for information about how people such as Sword and Crazy Horse judged their own historical situation. In support of the resistance hypothesis, we have the recorded response of a soldier who watched Crazy Horse's surrender: "'By God,' he said to those around him, 'this is a triumphal march, not a surrender.'"<sup>10</sup>

For Sword, whose role was far less dramatic, maintaining the position of freedom meant dissociating his own motives from General George Crook's orders without denying that he was privy to the general's plans. Eli Ricker's interview reveals Sword's careful and characteristic distinctions that allow us to judge the man at the same time as we gain some insight into historical events: "Sword says that none of this delegation went as scouts, but as volunteer Indians carrying the olive branch of peace and good will. He states that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote General Crook to dispatch these Indians on this peace mission. He adds that besides the thirty men and himself three or four women went in the party."

Sword's autobiographical statement emphasizes that he was choosing and deciding on his own, for reasons that went beyond anything the military was telling him. As his version of events progresses, we find in it several clues that reveal a style of resistance based on doing what had to be done, but doing it for reasons that turn military defeat to moral victory. He tells about all the difficulties his group faced on their journey to Crazy Horse. Twice they wanted to turn back, "but Enemy Bait [George Sword] insisted on going on and challenged them to go with him; so they had a night meeting and agreed to continue on" (94).

a great success and given the people a thankworthy gift" (sections 197, 198, and 199 of the autobiographical statement).

10. Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 361.

By far, the most significant evidence for the attitudes that I am describing is Sword's transcription of a speech that Iron Hawk, speaking for Crazy Horse, gave in response to Sword's message of peace and safety for the Crazy Horse band. By including it in his autobiographical statement, Sword made it, by implication at least, a commentary on his own life:

"Well, Enemy Bait, sit and listen carefully! This is my country and in this manner the Great Spirit raised me so in this manner I live, but, my friend, the white men from where the sun rises came stealing my land and now the country is small so I do not permit him in my country, yet he comes in and when he sees me, then he shoots at me, and then I too shoot at him and I kill some of them and while I stand looking at them, I am sorrowful. 'These, I have beaten their relatives!' I think, and so I bring grief upon myself.

"So he who acts for the President: 'He wishes peace,' you all say.

"Well, it shall be a great peace! As for me, when anyone brings good to me, he will not outdo me."

This speech turns concession into a victory. It stays one step ahead of the colonizers. It represents a form of resistance through belief in the traditional motivational foundations, and it transforms them into a way of living in the reservation environment. In Sword's other writing, we find regular evidence of this judgment style, which is really an ascription of Lakota evaluations to actions that could appear to be accommodations to the will of the conqueror. Even the mythic texts can be read as codes for using older beliefs as a basis from which to outdo the Americans in establishing a new way of life under reservation political structures. In support of such judgments about his actions and his writings, we have the facts of Sword's life history, which prove that he had the experience needed to understand the bicultural pressures that the Lakota nation had to face during those crucial turn-of-the-century years; and he had the literary ability to give narrative expression to the cognitive strategies that could help the people through the transitions.

Tracing all the historical references to Sword gives enough information to justify the belief that he walked the tightrope strung between competing loyalties with agility, integrity, and unfailing dignity. He certainly had to do it often enough under circumstances that even privileged historical judgment cannot lightly decide because the faces of human hunger, fear, and sickness have to be remembered and taken into account along with ideological positions. Sword did not even have the advantage of getting along

with Red Cloud. His conviction that Red Cloud was not the rightful leader is recorded in a letter he wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The conflict between the two men complicated an already tense and factionalized political scene that Sword had to negotiate in order to advance causes he believed in.<sup>11</sup> He was a complex man working amidst volatile and dangerous social tensions. Although I emphasize evidence of Sword's resistance to complete cultural assimilation as expressed through his determination to build a reservation way of life based on Lakota values, I also recognize that, from our current perspective at least, many of his actions seem to be inconsistent with an attitude of resistance to the domination of United States rule. He was captain of the Indian Police, tribal court judge, and a catechist in the Episcopal church. None of this fits with popular stereotypes of how to resist Euro-American influences. My arguments depend on what I can learn of his motivations and on his consistent efforts to preserve information about pre-reservation life and beliefs.

Before turning to Sword's own writing for evidence of awareness that maintaining the Lakota way of life demanded new expressive forms for old beliefs and values, we can note one more historical confirmation of Sword's conviction that traditional motivations could coexist with "a new order of things." Charles Alexander Eastman includes a telling episode in his autobiography that describes the "dignified and intelligent," but deeply worried, Sword, warning Eastman about the misunderstandings that eventually culminated in the massacre at Wounded Knee. At the time, Eastman was the newly posted Sioux Indian physician at Pine Ridge, having studied medicine at Boston University upon completion of his undergraduate work at Dartmouth College. Sword welcomed Eastman to the reservation and gave him a short speech to impress him with the fact that the presence of an eastern-educated Sioux at Pine Ridge was proof of "a new order of things." Sword hoped that Eastman's bicultural knowledge could reveal ways to avert the danger posed by the military's misunderstandings of the Ghost Dancers' intentions. When Eastman questioned Sword about why the people were dancing, Sword replied in a manner that showed him in his typical position of someone who had spoken to people on both sides of a conflict. He understood the grief that motivated the Ghost Dance just as he knew that the military leaders would not relent in their determination to stop the dancing with force if need be:

11. See Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem*, 278-79.

All they ask is to be let alone. They say the white man is not disturbed when he goes to his church. . . . But I must tell you, however, that the agent has just ordered the police to call in all Government employees with their families to the agency. This means that something is going to happen. I have heard that he will send for soldiers to come here to stop the Ghost dance. If so, there will be trouble.<sup>12</sup>

Sword's own ability to recognize and to work within the "new order of things" that was thrust upon the Sioux can be traced to his own first visit to the East Coast as a member of the delegation that negotiated treaty rights. In a document prepared for Walker, he lets us sense how the alien sights and sounds combined to forge his conviction that the Lakota could neither ignore nor escape the determined and aggressive permanence that was symbolized by the architecture of cities like Washington, D.C. and New York. "I went to Washington and to other large cities and that showed me that the white people dug in the ground and built houses that could not be moved. Then I knew that when they came they could not be driven away" (*Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 74).

The intelligent young warrior who went to Washington proud of his brave role in many battles returned to Dakota territory determined to understand more about the people whose very buildings symbolized the intent behind the terrifying guns they had demonstrated for the visiting Sioux delegation. Since his own spiritual beliefs taught him that all human accomplishments were concrete evidence of spiritual powers, Sword decided that the white man's God must have some exceptional powers, and he decided to find out more about the deity who had inspired all that he saw in the urbanized East. This quest eventually led him all the way to positions of leadership in the Episcopalian church. His formative experience in Washington, D.C. even inspired a new name—Sword. He explains that he took that name "because the leaders of the white soldiers wore swords" (*Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 74). That it also happened to be the name of his recently deceased brother is another of the many examples of how Sword managed to carry forward Lakota traditions, while investing them with a significance that operated as evidence of change.

The matter of his name is pivotal in every sense. As we attempt to judge how much of his writing is direct commentary and how much repre-

sents aesthetic restructuring, we can follow references to his name like a lure leading us into imaginative terrain. Sword's autobiographical statement in the ledgerbook appears to give a slightly different explanation of how he acquired his name: It links the name change to his visit to Crazy Horse's camp. That linkage is more a matter of narrative juxtaposition than implied cause and effect, so the one reference does not necessarily cancel out the other. The juxtaposition simply lets us know that the significance of the name derives from both sets of experience, each giving meaning to the proper name that can stand as its explanation and source. Nevertheless, to one reading with Euro-American narrative expectations, the different references seem to involve a contradiction, and they trigger a questioning response to an apparent contradiction. This kind of response alerts us to the fact that we are outside our usual narrative and aesthetic territories.

The problem of moving back and forth between Lakota and Euro-American interpretive narrative conventions is less difficult in Sword's work than in monocultural texts because of Sword's ability to understand so many non-Indian narrative expectations. We can trace references to two sets of cultural presuppositions, and that guidance is what gives particular value to Sword's writing. It is boundary writing and transitional writing that can be placed with other works functioning as literary thresholds between cultures. In Sword's case, the transitional nature of the texts is far more than the surface marking of a few concessions to another culture. A proper study of transitional features in Sword's writing would involve specifying the cognitive qualities of narrative as cultural form with meaning beyond its explicit content.

Sword's autobiographical writing provides several easily presented examples of the process. Its primary structure and content clearly follow the traditional Lakota conventions guiding formal, public oral presentations of personal experiences, and it has to be judged first in relation to these conventions. Of all the formalized modes of Sioux narrative, the recounting of one's accomplishments was perhaps the most central—it was the narrative performance for which all other types were prelude and preparation. The telling of one's own story was the occasion to prove that one had learned the lessons of the other tales and could add one's own deeds to the store of tales that marked the community's passage through time and space. Sitting Bull's earliest authoritative biographer noted that the stories of one's deeds formed "the invariable credentials for a man performing any public action." A man who could not show these credentials was "automatically

12. See Charles Alexander Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1925), 82–88.

banned from participation in tribal or ceremonial affairs. He was, in effect, disenfranchised and disqualified. He could not even name his own child."<sup>13</sup>

The Bushotter manuscripts tell us about the traditional content for such narrations and suggest the wide range of content accepted as appropriate to personal narrations. "They will recount brave deeds, say in what year they did them; what their thoughts were; how many women they seduced; how many divorced by public proclamation; how they treated their father-in-law or father. Furthermore, they will describe the kinds of country they have moved about in during their nomadic days; and altogether they will speak of the past with sad wistfulness."<sup>14</sup>

Sword's autobiography begins with content that seems in complete accord with what we know of traditional oral performances. He names his parents, brothers, and sisters, telling us that his mother was a Hunka (ceremonially honored child) and that his father was a brave warrior, whose several names all commemorated specific acts of bravery. Sword was the fourth and last-born son of his father's first wife. His childhood name was *lciblebleca* (Shakes Himself). In the notes she appended to her translation of the autobiography, Ella Deloria comments on the name: "It means to shake one's self by inner force like a horse after rolling or a dog after swimming" (103).

Sword assures his readers that he was a docile child who grew up "without giving undue anxiety, for which his father and mother loved him" (84). This beloved child, however, apparently provoked plenty of anxiety when he reached the age of fifteen and began to chafe under his mother's watchful protectiveness. He ran away to join a war party. At this point in the autobiography, Sword's literary skill becomes evident. With deft timing and descriptive economy, he sketches a bit of humorous and gentle self-mockery. Referring to himself in the third person, as he does throughout his autobiography, he writes: "Here was his appearance. He rode a horse, two years old, awfully tame, with a big belly. He wore a robe of calf-skin, carried a quiver with three arrows and a bow. The party put up for the night; but he feared being scolded so he kept at a distance" (85).

Ella Deloria notes how Sword's Lakota style includes a suffix for the word *horse*, which "indicates amusement at the boy who thinks he can

fight on such an unwieldy animal" (105). Sword could easily poke fun at his youthful self because his later exploits earned him enduring respect as a warrior. The next sections of the autobiography, in true oral conventional style, narrate how he got the physical battle scars that he could show as bodily marks that proved his narrative claims. He details the battles that earned him the name Enemy Bait. One wonders why he does not include mention of how he received the most impressive credentials of all, the Sun Dance scars; this kind of questioning takes us beyond the conventions of the oral account to awareness of writing as a medium that obviates the necessity for constant repetition. Sword wrote about his visions and the Sun Dance elsewhere and did not, perhaps, feel that this information needed to be repeated in the autobiographical section.

The principles that organize the narrative structure of the separate parts of the autobiography combine chronology with selective topicality. First, he presents his acts of military bravery, then he recounts details of his marital life, and, finally, he gives examples of his work as a negotiator of peace. The examples are apparently meant to show a typical pattern, a kind of paradigm for character development, because Sword certainly did not aim for a complete account of his life. (There is no mention, for example, of his role in such momentous historical events as the Wounded Knee Massacre.) The purpose of the narrative is not to tell the entire story of his life; instead, he is narrating examples of how he earned the right and authority to exercise leadership and to make judgments about the welfare of others. That is the primary presentational feature that distinguishes accounts such as Sword's from Euro-American autobiographical narrative. It leads to a sharply contrasting form of self-presentation. And Sword, perhaps as a gesture toward his non-Indian readers, explicitly notes the purpose of his particular narrative: "It is unseemly for one who can not accomplish such things to occupy a position of leadership. For himself, he never did any evil thing, but wisely and moderate in action, he lived. And he was not one to maintain a spirit of jealousy and all men were his friends. And he often gave feasts in his home" (102).

One definite formal adaptation necessitated by writing to and for an audience in distant places and cultures is his description of his own physical features. Sword concluded his autobiography with details that would have been obvious to anyone attending a proper oral performance.

George Sword was nice-looking; very long hair, reaching down to the rounding points of his buttocks; and his body was neither long

13. Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 11.

14. George Bushotter, Lakota texts, MS 4800, section 6, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



nor short, in between; and neither too big nor too little, but in between. He was light skinned; kind of light complexion, as it were; his eyes were black. And his powers of perception were exceptional; so that he was skillful and could make anything; and he drew (or wrote or painted) well. He was gifted in writing the language of the Dakotas; and nobody was as learned in that among the Oglalas as he. Moreover, he could read words here and there in English. (102)

In 1896, the Lakota man who had run away from home to join a war party met another man from another way of life who had also run away from home to join an army.<sup>15</sup> James R. Walker came to Pine Ridge Reservation in 1896, and the friendship between Sword and Walker meant that the unusual conjunction of talents and obsessions driving each man resulted in exchanges with enduring cultural, as well as personal, importance. James R. Walker was a physician who found himself in charge of caring for more than seven thousand people at a time when disease was rampant. Tuberculosis had reached the epidemic stage. All efforts to check diseases were hampered by the general conditions of malnutrition. Knowing he could do little, Walker consulted the traditional healers, asked their help, and offered to exchange medical information with them. To gain the trade secrets of the traditional healers, he had to undergo a process of learning that involved his step-by-step initiation into the religious mysteries of the Lakota, an initiation that Sword supervised in the capacity of close friend and mentor and the one who had sought spiritual guidance for the entire project.

As time passed, Walker seemed to realize that he had found a spiritual home after a lifetime of a peculiar homelessness. He had run away from his family to join the army during the Civil War. Chronic dysentery weakened him, and, by war's end, he knew that he wanted to become a physician. He attended Northwestern University Medical School, where he did well academically, although his advisors told him that the physical rigors of practicing medicine in a city were too much for him. They gave him the outrageous advice that practicing on an Indian reservation would be less demanding. The idea appealed to Walker. His wife refused to live on reservations, so Walker finally left his family behind and went alone to the work that has had such an impact on Lakota culture and on the way the world perceives it.

The anthropologist Clark Wissler went to Pine Ridge in 1902 to do

fieldwork. There, he met Walker and recognized an exceptional opportunity. Walker was far better situated to get the information that Wissler sought than any ordinary fieldworker could ever be. During the next ten years, Walker and Wissler carried on a regular correspondence that enables us to follow the development of Walker's thinking about what he was learning at Pine Ridge. Wissler supervised the preparation of the monograph, published in 1917.

Sword seems to have been a consistent Lakota mentor and friend. Pine Ridge residents remember the long nights of conversation Walker enjoyed with Sword and other distinguished elders, such as Thomas Tyon and American Horse, because Walker's automobile was so conspicuous that people noted his comings and goings. As the friendship between Sword and Walker grew, so apparently did Sword's determination to tell Walker what otherwise would have been privileged sacred knowledge. Walker, for his part, promised not to tell anyone else but to record it for the benefit of future generations of Oglala. Insofar as we can judge, he kept his promises, and we assume that much of what he learned was woven into his retelling of the narratives Sword wrote for him. We do not know much about the circumstances of Sword's writing, although we can see from Walker's correspondence with Wissler that Walker was seeking mythic explanations for rituals, like the Sun Dance, and was unable to find them. Surely he questioned Sword, who finally must have decided to write just such an explanation, but he did it without telling Walker.

Walker left Pine Ridge in 1914, taking into his retirement all the manuscripts gathered during eighteen years. Among them were many that Sword had written in Lakota, covering aspects of belief, myth, and ritual. In addition, Walker had the ledgerbook in which Sword had written his autobiography. Sword died before Walker found time to translate most of this writing, so important questions about Sword's work will probably never be answered.

Reading Walker's letters to Wissler, we learn that Walker finally translated Sword's mythic stories while he was completing his Sun Dance manuscript for Clark Wissler. We can also deduce that the tales were a complete surprise to him, and he recognized them as a gift and an end to a long search. He immediately wrote to Wissler, expressing relief that he had finally found "myths" that explain all the others and that link mythic to ritual action. From that letter, we know that during all his years at Pine Ridge Walker had never heard anything like the stories he found among his manuscripts. He told Wissler that the stories answered all his questions about

15. For a biographical account of James R. Walker, see *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, 3-54.

the relationships among supernatural beings and that he planned to publish them along with other myths to be appended to the Sun Dance study.

Parts of that letter are so crucial to the way we judge the mythic texts today that its rather inconclusive language requires quotation:

In translating the legends of "When the People Laughed at the Sun" and "When the Directions Were Made on the World," as written by Sword, I came upon what appears to me to be valuable information relative to the relation of the supernatural beings. . . . There is also in these legends information relative to the establishment of the time, a moon and a year with its seasons. The mythology as I have written it leaves much to be explained and the information above mentioned explains some of this. . . . The legends are quite long; they, in fact, being of the kind told by the professional story tellers of the Lakota who tell their stories at the winter camp usually prolonging the story during the entire occupancy of the camp. It appears to me that this information received in this way is sufficient for accepting it relative to the mythology of the Lakotas for it harmonizes with much that was only alluded to in other information I had received regarding the matters referred to. (*Lakota Myth*, 12)

Today, Walker's ambiguous phrase "relative to the mythology of the Lakotas" seems to conceal more about the lost original manuscript than it reveals. Whether it was deliberate evasion or simple stylistic clumsiness, Walker, guided by Wissler, chose to publish the tales as examples of Lakota mythology without attribution to Sword. The narratives evoked considerable interest globally among scholars analyzing relationships between myth and culture. During the early part of this century, anthropologists and folklorists were following the lead of Scandinavian folklore scholars as they traced the distribution of plots and examined local variations as evidence of distinctive features in the social life of specific cultures. Franz Boas's statement in his essay "Development of Folk-Tales and Myths" summarizes general anthropological beliefs of the time, and it lets us judge preferred methods of oral narrative study. By implication, Boas's statement shows why anthropologists at the time were so reluctant to give up their stakes in Sword's narratives as examples of orally transmitted mythic plots:

From a study of the distribution and composition of tales we must then infer that the imagination of the natives has played with a few plots, which were expanded by means of a number of motives that

have wide distribution, and that there is comparatively little material that seems to belong to any one region exclusively, so that it might be considered as of autochthonous origin. The character of the folktales of each region lies rather in the selection of preponderant themes, in the style of plots, and in their literary development.

. . . everywhere tales attach themselves to phenomena of nature. . . . The distribution of these tales demonstrates clearly that the more thought is bestowed upon them by individuals deeply interested in these matters—by chiefs, priests, or poets—the more complex do they become and the more definite are the local characteristics that they develop.<sup>16</sup>

Walker's 1917 publication became a standard, worldwide source for information about the Oglala Sioux, their rituals and myths, and the relationships between the two. Scholars consistently mentioned the systematic, rational nature of Sword's tales and noted their consonance with the even more systematic explanations of symbolism and ritual that also came from Sword. But the mythic texts acquired other, quite different spheres of popular influence, as well, and their current vitality has as much to do with their general popular readership as it does with the way scholars used them to illustrate methods and theories.

Walker was so taken with the literary possibilities of what he had discovered that he decided to use the plot as the basis for a cycle of narratives incorporating all that he knew about Lakota belief, ritual, and culture. He continued to revise this magnum opus until his death, after which the many drafts were given to the Colorado Historical Society, where his unfinished compendium remained until the cultural revivals at Pine Ridge began to take place following the 1972 American Indian Movement's occupation at Wounded Knee.

Educators at Pine Ridge wanted to use traditional Lakota myth as a foundation for study of Lakota culture. Available mythic sources, oral and written, seemed fragmentary, however, and their connections with ritual action and symbolism were difficult to discern. The confusion that Walker had known in his earlier studies was also experienced by Lakota people after the traditional rituals and myths had been suppressed and their connections to details of daily life began to fade from collective memory. Then, after decades of underground existence, the old Lakota rituals were revital-

16. Franz Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* (New York: Collier, Macmillan Limited, 1940), 404, 406.

ized, and they became, again, the openly acknowledged core of the nation's life. Much had been lost, however. Not surprisingly, Walker's unpublished narrative cycle had the emotional force and the clear intellectual scope that the Lakota sought as they returned to the older traditions. So, the least fragmentary of the drafts of Walker's long narrative cycle were returned to the Oglala people, who, for many years, used mimeographed copies of the 185 typescript pages in the reservation's schools. The situation changed when the founding committee of the Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln asked the Oglala people what such a center could do to help them. Their answer was: Publish the Walker manuscripts. Some months later, I began that task and was soon joined by Raymond J. DeMallie.

In *Lakota Myth*, I publish both Walker's reworked narrative cycle and the versions of Sword's stories that were as close as I could come to Sword's own writing. I present what information we have been able to gather about the history and provenance of the texts. In its mimeographed format, however, both Walker's literary cycle and the summaries of Sword's stories published in 1917 had taken on a life of their own, and many people found that information about the texts got in the way of their responses to the texts.

In 1987, Dorothy Dooling published a slightly retold version of Walker's narrative cycle as a book for "lovers of myth." Her commentary is proof that when it comes to transitional texts with mythic roots, information about the creativity of specific individuals is easily set aside in favor of evidence of communal elements, even in the copyright-obsessed world of contemporary American publishing:

My contribution seems to me to have been only in trying to carry to completion Dr. Walker's intention, letting the stories find their way into a connected whole and editing and smoothing over certain inconsistencies of detail and style. Nevertheless, I am sure that willy-nilly something that is personal to my own appreciation and understanding has crept in to shape my retelling, and so added another shading of interpretation to those of each of the others who have told these tales before me. It is an inevitable part of the process of myth's transmission that all its lovers leave in it something of their own substance.<sup>17</sup>

The determination to view as legitimate myth not just Sword's narratives but Walker's, too, is far stronger than any willingness to see them as carefully constructed narrative codes that teach about myth and belief. Part of the difficulty derives from the fact that Sword's tales represent a form of creativity that does not fit any of our complex categories for describing narrative. If, as close study of the texts suggests, they are a kind of metamyth that facilitates understanding among different mythic and cultural systems, then all the different uses of them are fulfilling the grandest hopes of Sword and Walker, and debate about authorship quickly turns to questions about the impact of religious belief on narrative. On that point, Vivian Arviso One Feather, writing an introduction for Dooling's volume, made the comments that account for the position of many Lakota:

My personal perspective is to stress the urgency of sharing this knowledge. My children, being of Lakota descent, were raised within the social traditions of their father's tiospaye (community). This particular tiospaye is proud of its history of having produced strong leaders among the Oglala Lakota on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Like other concerned parents, I desire that my children understand and develop a deeper appreciation of their human existence and mature with the knowledge that the Lakota Nation began, not with the arrival of Columbus, but with the creation of this universe. And more importantly, they comprehend that as a people the Lakota Nation will endure indefinitely.<sup>18</sup>

### Sword's Mythic Texts

Using whatever historical information we can find about George Sword, we can build a case for reading his fictional narrative as a showpiece of resistance and transitional literature that highlights features of traditional beliefs in order to reveal their significance within the changed circumstances of reservation life. The details of such a reading are, of course, speculative and inconclusive, but, as his life history and his other writing shows, Sword undoubtedly possessed the quality of mind and experience that prompted him to think about the connections between the traditional Lakota culture and the new, imposed reservation culture. All of his writing indicates that he had a powerful rationalizing and systematizing intelligence able to abstract cultural principles that could help people function within a new environ-

17. Dorothy Dooling, *The Sons of the Wind* (New York: Parabola Books, 1987), vii-ix.

18. Vivian Arviso One Feather, introduction to Dooling, *The Sons of the Wind*, viii-ix.

ment. This talent was accompanied by an exceptional capacity to adapt to changed circumstances. Scholars from Clark Wissler to Paul Radin, to Clifford Geertz, to William Powers have all been impressed with Sword's "reasoned articulateness," even though they did not necessarily connect what they read in Walker's 1917 publication with the actual historical contributions of Sword and his closest friends. Clark Wissler wrote, "Among the Teton there were philosophers of no mean order who reflected upon things as experienced, sought explanations in terms of causes and looked for the signs of a unified system embracing the universe. They gave numbers a place in the mysteries, placing all powers in a hierarchy of fours."<sup>19</sup>

Wissler based his general comments largely on what he had learned from Walker, and Sword was preeminent among the philosophers Wissler admired. I quote these observations because it is precisely Sword's frequently noted ability to abstract the patterns guiding ritual and narrative imagery and then to use them to show connections with other facets of the culture that I want to use as the basis of my reading of his fictional texts. First, though, a summary of the actual narrative content is in order.

The first tale begins in a world below the current one, where a chief and his wife have a daughter who is "the most beautiful of women." She marries Tate (the Wind) and gives birth to quadruplets, a sign that these children are gods. Her father, Wazi, is not content to be the mere grandfather of gods. He wants to have godlike powers for himself. That excessive desire provides the entrance cue for Trickster, who in this tale is a tempter bearing a definite resemblance to Satan in Genesis. He tells Wazi that he can have what he wants only if he will scheme to make the other gods look ridiculous. Wazi is nervous and consults his wife. She turns out to be a truly devious strategist who comes up with the altogether logical idea that they can trick the Trickster, believing that once they become gods they will be more powerful than he is, and they can simply ignore him. Wazi falls for this specious logic and agrees to help Trickster in exchange for godlike powers.

The logic of power, however, does not cover all contingencies. Wazi's wife can see into the future, so she already knows that their daughter will some day be seated with the most powerful gods. Therefore, when her beautiful daughter claims that she wants to become even more beautiful just in order to achieve what has, after all, been preordained, her parents

test their new divine powers by letting her use a charm they have made. It works. The daughter is soon so beautiful that one look at her makes Wi (the Sun) forget everything else, including his wife, Hanwi (the Moon). Contrary to all the dictates of law and order, he gives Hanwi's symbolic place to Wazi's daughter. The Moon is displaced. She is deeply insulted and goes to Skan, the supreme judge and arbiter, to protest her injured pride, grief, and anger. Skan acts like the wise judge that Sword surely tried to be during his years as judge at Pine Ridge. He questions all participants in this event and renders the series of judgments that exile Tate and his motherless sons to the next world, where there are no directions, no spatial or temporal markings. The only existing order is that which reigns in Tate's tipi, where each inhabitant has his rightful place in relation to all the others.

The next narrative tells about creating order in the New World. One day a woman arrives. She introduces herself as the daughter of Skan and says that she has come to help the sons mark directions on the world so that each can know where he belongs in space and in time. The oldest son, a surly, discourteous fellow, is to have the first direction. The Wizard, another exile from the previous world, tricks the elder brother and arranges to have his birthright given to the next brother, a far more worthy type. The duped brother complains, but it is too late—he has lost his birthright. Jealousy and resentment become part of the order of creation. Eventually, after a series of adventures, each brother establishes his direction and with it the possibilities of temporal and spatial divisions in this world that can be marked on the circular picture of the cosmos that Wohpe keeps. Therefore, their actions become the means of "drawing" the basic Lakota symbolic form, namely, the circle divided into four quadrants.

By giving explicit narrative references that corresponded with the visual details of the basic circular imagery, Sword could show how mythic signifiers summed up by the circle image might be systematically translated and expanded into easily updated social, political, and psychological references. Sword's obvious theme of exile and beginning anew after the collapse of a previous way of life is set in relation to a plot episode that, in its general outline, owes more to the biblical story of Adam and Eve than it does to plots that were part of the Lakota oral tradition. If Sword was inspired by biblical episodes, however, he was equally alert to the tropological resources of the most frequently narrated Lakota tales. As noted above, the basic symbolism, the working of circular imagery, in his tales is definitely Lakota. It owes little or nothing to biblical sources. The same is true for the conventional opening motifs in Lakota hero tales that often begin

19. Clark Wissler, *Indians of the United States* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), 163. See also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 128; and William Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977).

by mentioning four brothers who live together. The action of the tale gets under way when an unknown woman comes to the tipi. Sword's tale uses the same motif, except that he explicitly identifies the brothers with the four winds and the woman with Wohpe, the mediator. He gives the brothers a task and a quest that allows him to use the story about the winds as a way to explain and to dramatize the range and functions of the primary Lakota symbolic structures, all of which were traditionally subsumed under references to circle imagery. Within this symbolic construct, spatial references to the four directions coincide with temporal references to four phases of human life, and these, in turn, involve seasonal, vegetal, and zoological divisions. Traditional Lakota belief taught all these connections, and people used that knowledge in reference to rituals and to oral narratives. In traditional storytelling, narrators could count on people understanding brief references that subsumed many traditional cognitive domains. A directional reference to the West, for example, could evoke a whole series of associated concepts that the storyteller could use without making them explicit. Sword, however, knew that his audience would include non-Indians, so he had to be clear in his references to all the major associations, and he had to explain them in one tale. The tropological resources he was employing were undoubtedly traditional, but many other features of Sword's tale were far from traditional, and, thanks to Franz Boas and Ella Deloria, we know how the Lakota reacted to Sword's tales during the early part of this century.

When Franz Boas read Sword's tales, he was definitely interested in them, and he sent them for verification to his former student Ella Deloria, who was sending him fieldwork data from several Sioux reservations.<sup>20</sup> Deloria herself was a member of a leading Sioux family, and she was a native Dakota speaker. Her professional anthropological training, combined with her personal experience of the traditions, made her the most qualified person to verify Sword's work by trying to find other oral versions. Using her knowledge of Lakota traditions and applying the standard criteria of the time, namely, the existence of variants and alternative versions for plots and motifs, Deloria concluded that Sword's texts were not examples of oral literature. Nevertheless, always willing to try to accommodate Boas, she interviewed several Lakota people, including Edgar Fire Thunder, one of Sword's friends who was living in a retirement home. Deloria transcribed and translated what he said about the tales, and, in an unusual and possibly

even unprecedented detail of ethnographic interviewing, she asked him to sign his name officially to the statement. Deloria apparently knew that the statement would be met with skepticism in New York.

Fire Thunder's testimony tells us much about how the Lakota viewed their traditions of storytelling, and it remains the single most important critical statement about Sword's texts. Fire Thunder left no doubt about his belief that the tales were examples of individual, not communal, creativity and that they differed significantly from any tales he had ever heard before:

In former times, the Dakotas had legends and beliefs, here and there, in a reasonable sort of way; and to this day, we live with them, more or less in our midst. There never was anybody telling such fantastic things in such infinite detail as this; if narrators had known any such tales as these they would have come out with them, for when they were commissioned to entertain with legends, and were given handsome rewards, they always went at it with the attitude, "Oh, for something new to tell"; or "I could tell anything." . . . The Dakota race lived on, with screens only the thickness of animal hide for protection; how is it that a big matter like these tales, however secretly discussed, could not have been overheard at sometime or other by some eavesdropper through thin walls?<sup>21</sup>

In spite of the testimony of Deloria and Fire Thunder, Franz Boas would not give up his hopes of finding validating evidence in oral traditions that would allow him to use the tales as examples of myth. He urged Deloria to continue to search. She did, even going so far as to ask her many friends and relatives to help her, but everyone apparently gave her the same kinds of response that she summarized in another letter to Boas: "'That must be from another tribe'—'That may be from the Bible'—'Somebody made that up according to his fancy'—'That's not Dakota!' Not once so far has anybody said of this part that maybe it was so believed in the past."<sup>22</sup>

In another letter to Boas, Deloria included a paragraph in which she astutely distinguished between folklore and oral fictional composition. That letter is another of her significant, but largely unnoted, contributions to our understanding of oral traditions. In it, she describes a process of individual oral creativity that other scholars and fieldworkers generally ignored be-

20. For more information on Ella Deloria's research on the Sword texts, see *Lakota Myth*, 17–27.

21. The complete transcript of this interview is in the Archives of the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia. It is entitled "Dakota Commentary on Walker's Texts."

22. Deloria to Boas, 28 June 1938.

cause it fit none of their expectations. Perhaps they simply did not pay attention to phenomena that they were not looking for, whereas Deloria knew the entire spectrum of Lakota narrative art:

[Sword's tales] might have been the creation of one mind. I am sure there were such cases of persons with superior imagination inventing tales which were their very own—not folklore. They might have been the beginnings of fiction writers. One woman used to weave such tales for us. Some of those I wrote out last spring are that kind; and others took, for instance, the Buffalo Wife story and embellished it so it sounded entirely different from the usual versions.<sup>23</sup>

I choose to accept Deloria's judgment, and I find Deloria's recognition of the original forms of fiction to be of extraordinary literary historical importance because she documents an expanded range of creative expression in communities where narrative continuity and development depended entirely on oral resources. I see Deloria's comment as evidence that the Sioux people did not always use traditional motifs and plots as building blocks for their tales. Those so inclined apparently allowed their imaginations to find new expressive and interpretive range that went far beyond the patterns set by the traditional tales. We can only regret that we have so few recorded examples of such fictional creation. I assume Sword's tales represent one example. Obviously, I assume that Sword's exceptional (and bicultural) imagination created tales that comment on ways in which traditional values and beliefs could continue to function in a reservation and a Christian environment.

In her statements about Lakota narrative genres, Deloria has also indicated that many Sioux people understood the tropological instrumentality afforded by the rich imagery of the traditional tales. Deloria describes the attitudinal frames used to interpret the *ohunkakan* (the oldest and most complex genre of tales):

To our minds, they are a sort of hang-over, so to speak, from a very, very remote past, from a different age, even from an order of beings different from ourselves. These tales, in which generally some mythological character like Iktomi, Iya, the Crazy Bull, the Witch, or Waziya (the Cold), takes part together with human beings, are part of the common literary stock of the people. Constant allusion is made

to them; similes are drawn from them which every intelligent adult is sure to understand.<sup>24</sup>

Viewed from within this literary context, we can see that Sword's narrative speculations were true to the spirit and the function of the folktale even if they were much more than usually original in their development. As the people's experiences changed, so did their needs for an expanded body of common literary allusions that could encompass features of the new way of life. That new way included non-Indians. Sword had goals that most traditional tellers did not have to consider—he had to make sure that his tales would explain features of Lakota worldview to cultural outsiders. He had, after all, taken upon himself Walker's instruction. Sword had given Walker an exceptionally complete Lakota education, but even Walker could not see the relationships between ritual actions and the traditional tales. Sword seemed to create a plot that dramatized just how the traditional metaphors worked. Or, to state his accomplishments in more academic terms, he managed to show how audiences with native textual competence understood the bonds between features of the texts and basic cognitive themes in the culture. Sword certainly did not know how to state what he understood in theoretical language, but he did know how to tell good stories, and he had a highly developed analogical imagination that was enhanced by his philosophical speculation on the meaning of Lakota stories, as well as the biblical stories that he told in his role as an Episcopalian catechist. So, he made up a story of his own that would explain some of the meaning that an intelligent pre-reservation Lakota took for granted as part of the knowledge everyone had about how “the powers of the world live and move.”<sup>25</sup>

Tate and his sons, living in their tipi in a world in which there is no direction, no marking for space and time, and hence no structure for social life, are personified symbols that function as condensed, but easily comprehensible, cultural references. Their retained vestiges of traditional roles are definite enough, so that, with a little bit of concentration and research, anyone from any culture can see how all of social structure is implicit and suspended in this family unit with its own spatial image, the tipi, which visually defines the place of each individual inhabitant in relation to all the others. Before this symbol can become operative, though, the woman who

24. Ella Deloria, *Dakota Texts* (New York: AMS Press, 1932), ix.

25. The phrase comes from John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1932), 208. Its usefulness derives from the way its dynamic emphasis captures the force of the ethnical imperatives within the Lakota worldview.

23. Deloria to Boas, 14 Feb. 1938.

will guide each of the men in working out his destiny has to come. As soon as she introduces change, the static, familial symbol is catalyzed into a dynamic model for action, which each of the four brothers dramatizes in his journey to create temporal and spatial divisions in the world. What was implicit in the image of the tipi gets played out on the historical stage of the New World, revealed in Sword's tale as an unsocialized macrocosm. Once its significance is enacted, the kinship image with its implicit reference to structure becomes a cultural grammar—in other words, a means of connecting details that would otherwise seem unrelated. Sword's story can remind the Sioux that their traditions prepare them to socialize (civilize) worlds. If the Americans thought they were civilizing the Sioux, men such as Sword could turn that belief on its head. Sword's tale seems to say that the Sioux needed to civilize the American influences that had their advantages if used properly but that were dangerous, too. Sword's narrative clearly points out that the way to civilize and to socialize is to follow the old patterns of kinship obligations in order to create new worlds.

To make explicit the ethical and emotional presuppositions that were implicit in the style and the structure of oral narratives, Sword chose to employ some of the conventions of literary realism. He dramatized motivations, fears, lusts, and loves, so that no one, no matter what his or her cultural background and training, could fail to grasp what was happening. Or, to return to the comments of the people that Ella Deloria interviewed, he had to make the spirits "act like people," so much like people that he exceeded what the conventions of oral literature could accommodate. His sympathetic characters step beyond the condensed form of myth into the grand, expansive, and more psychologically realistic schemes of epic. They cross over into interpretive frames that are bound to history, but they maintain definite ties with myth; they bring mythic symbolism into the workings of historical thought.

The best illustration of this dimension of the tales involves the characterization of Wohpe, the woman whose mythic role sums up most of the major features of woman's role in Lakota ritual and, therefore, in Lakota culture. We can glimpse the significance of Sword's changes by contrasting his psychologically realistic text with another one that has all the earmarks of a genuine, orally transmitted myth. This closely related tale tells about the Four Winds' dispute over which one will be Wohpe's husband. She chooses the South Wind, but the North Wind refuses to recognize her choice and tries to rape her. As one extant translation of the tale states,

When she found what the North Wind was trying to do, she took off her dress and spread it out and got under it to hide. So when the North Wind came to the dress, he thought he had found the beautiful being and he embraced it but everything on it grew hard and cold and icy. The South Wind found only a cold hard thing like his woman's dress but he could not find the woman so he went back to look for her. When he had gone, the North Wind came again and said to the woman, "I know you are under this dress and I am coming under there also." So he went to the edge of the dress but the woman spread it out farther that way. Then he went to the edge at another place and she spread it that way. He kept going from place to place and she kept spreading her dress wider and wider until it became so wide that there was no end or side left. Then he heard the South Wind coming again and he ran away to his tipi and when the South Wind came again he examined the dress and found that it was truly his woman's dress and then he knew that the North Wind had embraced it. He called loudly for his woman and she answered him that she was under the dress but that she had stretched it so wide to keep away from the North Wind, that there was neither a side nor an end to it and she could not get out from under it. (*Lakota Myth*, 184–85)

Sword retells the tale so that the powerful cosmological linkage between sexuality and the earth's fertility is retained, but he gives us a far more realistically portrayed woman. Gone is Wohpe's phenomenological identification with the earth, and the North Wind's attempted rape is gone, too. Instead we have a love story, in which Wohpe chooses the South Wind, while the North Wind stubbornly ignores her choice. He goes off on his journey to found his direction, still refusing to listen to her: "'When I come, I will take you for my wife.' 'I will always be your sister,' said Wohpe. 'You will be my wife,' said Yata" (*Lakota Myth*, 77).

Later, after the North Wind has lost the first direction to his younger brother, he learns from the wizard, who is guiding the brothers in their journey, that when he gets back home he will experience Wohpe's pity, "as a sister should pity a brother" (*Lakota Myth*, 85). Then, in disappointed rage, the North Wind weeps, but Wohpe herself has no cause for fear. She is safely at home with Tate, dreaming of the brother she really loves. The story of the brothers and Wohpe is a romance complete with daydreams and



conversations about the attributes of the beloved. It is a long way from the stark, ontological consequences of the other myth.

As Sword gives us the narrative detail that sometimes reveals and sometimes alters the cognitive significance that was implicit in oral narratives, he also helps us understand a narrative logic that depends on traditional and recognized mythic oppositional categories. His own narrative goals, though, have the practical effect of subverting the oppositions and establishing still higher-level structures of inclusion. He avoids the kind of thinking that requires one to choose either one or the other interpretation. As he struggled with the new bicultural conditions of life at Pine Ridge, he used mythic narrative as a means of charting changes in a way of thinking. I do not mean to imply that he did this consciously. I believe that he instinctively used the analogical resources available to him within his tradition to show more than one cognitive domain operating in relation to basic Lakota symbolism. This highlighting of narrative's potential to create polyvalent forms may be the most brilliant aspect of his creativity and the finest evidence of his rationalizing intelligence. He sets forth a narrative logic governed at every level by both/and propositions that work as a kind of narrative circuit breaker, allowing each term to achieve its maximum semantic range in order to include apparent contradictions within that range. The dynamic is implicit in traditional Lakota stories, but when Sword reveals its explicit narrative structure in his tales, he also changes the nature of its impact from the imagistic, analogical, and ontological impact of myths to a more realistic and historical scheme.

Throughout the development of Sword's plot, we can watch various kinds of dual logic unfold. One striking, and easily explicable, feature of it is revealed through the way characters become dualistic representations. Plot action evolves so that characters' actions have the effect of making an individual stand for different, even contrary, facets of Lakota symbolism. For example, plot establishes conditions under which the Moon is always both near and far from the Sun. When she is literally near her husband, the Sun, she must hide her face, thus becoming figuratively distant. The situation is reversed when she is physically distant. Then, her face is clear for all to see, and her visibility functions as a mode of proximity. Ite, the woman who takes the place of the Moon, is a figure who can take on several functions of duality. The temporal progression shows her first as a wife, then as a desired, but inaccessible, woman. She even acquires two faces and two distinct identities; hence, she gains the name Double Face, she is celestial in origin but terrestrial in destiny, she is the mother of sons who inherit both

divinity and humanity, and she can, therefore, understand both but finally possesses neither. Likewise, Wohpe, the woman who guides the creation of the directions, achieves a relationship that alternates between sister and desired lover to the winds, and this composite identity has meteorological, as well as cosmological, significance. When they view her as a sister, the weather is good; when they imagine her as a potential lover, the weather is stormy. In every way, these manifestations of dualism reflect narrative participation in and departure from the traditional mythic system, functioning as a narrative that is finally both Lakota and Christian.

As the Lakota people stated so definitely to Ella Deloria, certain of Sword's stylistic and content features have unmistakable resemblances to Genesis. The Bible was translated into Dakota by 1880, and it became primary reading material for the literate Lakota.<sup>26</sup> Certainly Sword knew it well, and his narratives show direct evidence of his imaginative reworkings of his catechistic reading and teaching. A comparison between the biblical text and the section of Sword's narrative in which Skan gives his judgment on all who participated in the unseating of Hanwi shows obvious similarities:

#### Sword

Skan said to Wi, "Why have you permitted a woman to sit on the seat of Hanwi?"

Wi replied, "This woman is the wife of a God and the mother of Gods and should be honored above all other women. As chief of the Gods, I would honor her as she deserves so that others would do so. I bid her to the feast. She sat on the seat of Hanwi and I looked on her beauty and it caused me to forget my companion. (*Lakota Myth*, 54)

#### Genesis

The Lord God called to the man . . . "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

The man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate." (Gen. 3: 9–12)

26. We have documented evidence of Black Elk's use of biblical references. He even took the Bible with him to England when he traveled with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. See DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 10–11. For a Lakota translation of the Bible, see Thomas S. Williamson and Stephen R. Riggs, trans., *Dakota Wowapi Wakan: The Holy Bible, in the Language of the Dakotas* (New York: American Bible Society, 1880).



The deities question each participant in the event; the shamed ones answer, and each interaction has the length of a biblical verse and the ontological impact of a biblical judgment. Perhaps the most significant parallel between Sword's narrative and the Bible occurs at the level of plot adaptations, because the story of the lost Garden of Eden had so many potential resonances among Lakota audiences. Sword's story differs from the biblical Genesis primarily on the matter of the level of social organization in the idyllic lost world. Sword places a whole Lakota band in his lost Edenic world, where life is lived much as it was in pre-reservation times. What is more, his character analogue to Eve gets mixed up in rather more devious problems than Eve, who is faced with a single tempter. Sword's character makes her mistake because she fails to understand just how weak a leader can be. Her seeking after power might have worked if the Sun had not neglected his wife in favor of the beautiful Ite. Similarly, Sword's tempter has a more developed narrative complexity than we find in Genesis. In the Lakota translation of Genesis, the tempter is called the "wise serpent" (*ksapa*). The particular combination of wisdom and cunning that the tempter represents gets transferred easily to the whole tradition of the Lakota Trickster figure even if the moral characteristics undergo some significant changes in the process, and manuscript evidence from the Walker collection suggests that Sword was inclined to make that potentially controversial character transfer.

Sword found a second plot in the Bible and adapted it to fit his Lakota purposes in the story of how the North Wind loses his birthright to the West Wind on the journey to create directions on this world. In the Lakota Bible, the word for *birthright* is *watokahe*. It is a nominalized extension of the term for *first born*, making that state into an abstract condition. What came first is displaced in Lakota culture, just as it was with Abraham's sons. The Lakota people undoubtedly experienced their historical displacements as an end to life as they knew it. Sword's narrative, though, suggests that displacement can be a beginning. Such displacement is a beginning in the Bible, as well as in the stories Sword is telling.

Thus, Sword's Lakota characters retain their own value and their specific determinations within the Lakota worldview at the same time as they show their ability to play some of the mythic roles found in biblical narratives. He seems to be saying that each people has its own ways. Sword's story, however, allows Christian Lakota to see that one way does not necessarily have to cancel out the other. At every level then, Sword's texts can be seen to articulate the same message. Out of the long night of military defeat, the people can create anew, and they can do it in their own way; there

need not be a complete break with the cultural past, and Sword creates narrative transitions that bridge the ideological breaks. His narratives show the possibility of a sovereign ethos that avoids the colonial mentality and that motivates people to keep alive the political sovereignty guaranteed them by treaties. Political sovereignty is founded in historical continuity. Helping people perceive continuity amidst the changes of the reservation era appears to have been Sword's goal. He reveals the cognitive presuppositions that sustained myths, reaffirming interpretive strategies that are bound to the pragmatics of language use. In cultural contexts where people fear that their indigenous cognitive models are no longer workable, many experience that loss as the imposition of a crushing silence, a response that literature from many cultures dramatizes. Sword showed a way beyond the silence that descends when all language seems to have been shifted to another interpretive realm without leaving behind the new code for current use. Technically, according to the criteria that narrative scholars use, Sword's tales are fictions, but they fulfill all the functions of myth because they show the conditions for fundamental cultural creation. Sword was using the resources of his own imagination to establish dramatic examples of how to maintain endangered values and beliefs.

Some of the scholarly commentary on Sword's work supports the reading that I have been proposing. Clifford Geertz uses the statements of Sword and Tyon as examples of "the fusion of the existential and the normative . . . a subtle formulation of the relation between good and evil, and of their grounding in the very nature of reality. Circle and eccentric form, sun and stone, shelter and war are segregated into pairs of disjunct classes whose significance is aesthetic, moral, and ontological." In the same context, Geertz notes that "the tendency to synthesize worldview and ethos at some level if not logically necessary, is at least empirically coercive; if it is not philosophically justified, it is at least pragmatically universal."<sup>27</sup>

Sword's life history is strong evidence that his mythic narratives are indeed metaphorical realizations of an empirically coercive synthesis, with the coercive force deriving from the pervasive insecurity of the initial phases of reservation life. The insecurities have not gone away. The renewed interest in Sword's narratives testifies to the fact that their messages of self-determination continue to engage Lakota people. I give the last word in this essay to Vivian Arviso One Feather, who articulated some contemporary Lakota reasons for valuing Sword's narratives:

27. See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 127–28.

In a very simplified and yet profound manner, the basic guiding principles of Lakota culture are portrayed through the lives of these Sacred Beings. Unashamed of their surly and pouting behavior, these Sacred Beings continually tested the limits of their own powers. They coped with inner family quarrels, had strained relations in their marriages, and had to contend with those among themselves who desired greater powers. Ironically, even as they resolved their conflicts, they discovered newer conflicts within the solution.<sup>28</sup>

28. In Dooling, *The Sons of the Wind*, vii.